



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Water Conservation

Water quality is a critical environmental issue for all Americans. Nearly 80 percent of all water crosses private lands before it fills drinking glasses, cleans our clothes or reaches local businesses. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps private landowners plan and implement conservation practices that impact water resources throughout the country, making positive improvements that allow water to flow cleaner and clearer throughout rivers, streams and lakes – and into homes across the U.S.

Manure and pesticides are often applied to soil and crops to increase productivity, but during storms the nutrients from manure and pesticides can be carried into our nation's water bodies. Through cooperative conservation partnerships, NRCS works with landowners to develop and enact nutrient and pesticide management plans that keep these particulates and soil out of water supplies. During fiscal year 2005, NRCS helped farmers and ranchers improve their pesticide management on over 2.3 million acres and improve their nutrient management on about 2.5 million acres. (See map 2.).

With our many partners, NRCS helps prevent flooding and erosion by improving dams, seeding and installing rip-rap and vegetative cover. NRCS works to increase water supplies in rural communities by assisting local governments and other project sponsors to develop lakes for water supply and recreation.

NRCS conducts snow surveys and water supply forecasting to provide western states and Alaska with estimates of annual water availability, spring runoff and summer streamflows. (See map 1.). These forecasts are used for decisions relating to agricultural production, fish and wildlife management, flood control, recreation, power generation, water quality management and more.



NRCS voluntary programs that offer technical and financial assistance for water quality issues include:

- Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) Program – This program provides direct cooperative conservation planning, design, and implementation assistance, that helps people conserve, maintain, and improve their natural resources.
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – This program helps eligible participants install or implement structural and management practices on their land.
- Ground and Surface Water Conservation (GSWC) – This program provides assistance to producers to conserve ground and surface water by implementing technologies and practices that conserve water and mitigate the long-term impacts of drought.
- Conservation Security Program (CSP) – This program rewards landowners who have implemented effective conservation practices on their land.
- Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) – This program helps people protect and develop their economic, natural, and social resources under the guidance of a locally elected council. A RC&D council, with public involvement, identifies community natural resource concerns and needs. NRCS works with the council and landowners to develop and implement cooperative conservation plans that meet their needs.
- Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) – This program assists landowners with restoring and protecting wetlands through cooperative conservation easements and cost-share agreements.
- Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) – This program is for people who want to develop

Helping People Help the Land

and improve fish and wildlife habitat primarily on private land.

- Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) – This program offers assistance to protect life and property threatened by excessive erosion and flooding caused by the sudden impairment of a watershed from a natural disaster such as fires, drought, tornadoes and floods.

Through these programs, NRCS is able to help landowners install water quality and water management practices on their property. From 2002 through 2004, NRCS provided over \$2.1 billion in financial and technical assistance to landowners and communities to establish water conservation practices on their land.

NRCS has been successful at enhancing water quality throughout the country. The Conservation Security Program has rewarded producers for management activities that improve water quality. For example, in one state, over \$28,300 in CSP funds were awarded to participants who had enacted 31 Water Management Enhancements.

Whether you're a landowner, representative of a tribe or part of a conservation group, NRCS will work

Anyone interested in more information about NRCS programs and soil conservation should contact their local USDA Service Center or NRCS office. Information also is also on the Web at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>

